

Media/Society: Remapping the Field

Chuck Kleinhans

Introduction

Disharmonic Convergence

In Reagan's second term several conservative intellectuals published articles, books, and speeches calling for a return to "cultural literacy," or college basics, meaning re-establishing the traditional 20th century humanities curriculum. According to conservatives, the Great Western Tradition had been displaced by new multicultural and interdisciplinary programs such as Afro-American studies, Chicano studies, women's studies, popular culture and film studies. Ignoring the fact that typically such programs are underfunded and understaffed, and in many cases built through overtime and dedication, the critics did notice something true.

The basis for much film and other media arts studies in the US appeared with the significant shift in academic enrollments in the 1970s that decreased traditional humanities and arts areas, especially English and foreign languages, and swelled majors in other areas, such as communications, poli sci, and business. The long reign of language, literature, and history as the prestige curriculum in academe came to an end in the late Sixties less because of the criticism and antics of the New Left and counterculture, and more because the service sector economy found other majors well suited to the imperatives of a declining imperial, post-industrial economy. As the older U.S. pattern of low cost

subsidized higher education changed into today's personal debt-financed one for most students (US college grads' average debt on graduation is \$24,000), they looked for courses that would give them a job rather than an appreciation of the patriarchal caucasian past. By voting with their enrollment cards, they undercut the need for language, literature, and history classes.

SF. check
The end of print culture dominance seems like the end of civilization itself to conservative ideologues such as Allan Bloom, E. D. Hirsch, Jr., Lynn Cheney, and William Bennett, who can't seem to understand that because in a period of industrial decline, the US remains successful at exporting entertainment and images, it makes sense that those areas of the university which train students in the culture and consciousness industry will benefit at the expense of those areas linked to mechanical technologies. Nor do conservatives want to face the flip side of Reagan era. The Great Communicator created the ideological space that made their conservative claims plausible and respectable, but he also brought forth the consummate corporate man of the 80s: Ollie North scamming Iranian arms deals, raising money for the contras with his slide show, and shredding and lying to protect a Movie Star President.

Another conservative charge, that the now-tenured academic left ruthlessly dominates the universities and colleges, proves to be equally dubious on inspection, but recognizes a new development. Following the McCarthy era's silencing of dissent, there has been a broadening and expansion of radical discourse in higher education and in the broader intellectual world. At times this stems largely from students and activist teachers insisting on the relevance of new concerns in the classroom. At other times disciplinary boundaries change or crack as new people and

different views emerge. The introduction of media, along with issues of gender, race, class, and multicultural analysis into the curriculum redefines the terrain of intellectual radicalism as the introduction of new content opens the way for new forms of political analysis and discussion.

Film culture in the Fifties and Sixties began outside the university curriculum and often served as a cultural opposition to the dominant values of Cold War America. For many intellectuals in the post WW2 era, European art cinema and a struggling independent film movement encompassing experimental and documentary modes provided a look at cultures and ideas organized differently than ^{the} official American ^{blindness.} It was a field which included the dense international film culture of New York city, and a significant section of its intellectuals, as well as people sustaining a film society or small art theatre in a midwest college town. Film provided a glimpse of other peoples, other possibilities, other emotions, other lifestyles than those sanctioned by the official American blandness.

Media culture today is vastly larger. The industrially organized consciousness and consumption culture of the US has its own caste of media producers and manipulators. For a specific part of the petty bourgeois intelligensia, media is or is closely related to their employment: in film, tv, video, advertising, public relations, performance, etc. For an overlapping group, cinema/video is a significant leisure/entertainment/cultural pursuit. These are people who attend festivals, art house screenings, film clubs, retrospectives, sponsored screenings for fundraising or educational purposes, etc. They like to also read about what is going on in newspapers, magazines, and books. If they're 20 or 30 something, they probably took several film courses in college. They pay attention to tv movie reviewers. Though more verbal

From the left
Jacoby...

and print oriented, they follow a similar pattern to more working class people who like to rent lots of movies to see at home on their VCR and who find out what's new and good from word of mouth, Entertainment Tonight and cable tv's current entertainment channels.

In such circumstances, the nature of film culture changes, expands, and blends into other areas of cultural concern. And the full fledged emergence of film and tv studies in the universities is part of that. The existence of professors calls forth conference papers, articles, reviews, and books. The existence of graduate and undergraduate students calls forth consumers for academic production. But something bigger than that is happening throughout the English speaking academic world right now. There is a huge expansion of work in the general area of cultural studies, and expansion which itself breaks down disciplinary boundaries between high and low culture, performing and fine arts, between critical and historical methodologies, between aesthetic and sociological analysis.

The result is a disharmonic convergence of people from very different academic disciplines, methodologies, suppositions, and experiences. To some extent media studies have always drawn investigators from other areas, but what we see now is a quantitative change which is producing a qualitative shift. The political significance of this is that there is a widespread ferment in the area of radical cultural criticism and the creation of a field which includes the stiffly academic and the informally journalistic, the delicate import and the hardy native, the theoretical and the experiential.

Today the US left has consistently intelligent and interesting cultural reportage and criticism in its two major weekly newspapers, *In These Times* and *The Guardian*. Other major forums for new cultural

analysis such as the *Village Voice* frequently publish progressive writers. Other signs of a resurgent cultural critique include new culturally oriented left publications such as *Borderlines*, *Cineaction*, and *Fuse* from Canada, new journals which stress the social nature of mass culture phenomenae such as *New Formations* (UK), *Cultural Studies* (Australia) and *Cultural Critique* (US). At the same time, some long standing publications have survived to the present and still contribute to innovative analysis such as *Screen* (UK), *New German Critique*, and *Camera Obscura*, while others have revived their relevance such as *October* with its recent AIDS and cultural activism issue. Monthlies such as *Afterimage* and *The Independent* have grown to be central sources for news and discussion of the independent media scene. University presses publish major anthologies such as Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg's *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Illinois) and Don Lazare's *American Media and Mass Culture* (California).

Conservatives are right to be worried about the expansion of radical intellectual thought in the area of culture and communications. It's clear that the momentum of new and interesting cultural analysis falls on the left side. Conservatives, wandering in their Gutenberg wilderness, haven't seen the superhighway of mass culture much less the bike path of critical cultural studies. Thus for the near future, at least, the continued expansion of mass culture analysis seems to fuel an alternative to George Bush's view of "a kinder and gentler America." There is a generation of professors now in the universities who are perhaps more liberal than radical, but who, in any case, see that the terms for understanding contemporary consciousness in an age of digital reproduction technologies are terms essentially set up by a range of radical thinkers and the

« Jacoby
loss of
pub. intell. »
change of
issues...
media mala

plurality of political movements they come out of. The triumph of the Right in the US, England, Canada and elsewhere in the 80s has been partly due to an immense economic power and some talent at manipulating the media environment. Its sore point in the 1990s may well be a generation of students facing diminished expectations and a lower standard of living than their parents being taught communications, not the classics, by leftists and liberals, feminists and internationalists, gays, lesbians, and other-gendered persons, Blacks and Latinos, and all the rest of the "cultural literacy" nightmare.

? add - ^{already there?} Jacoby - nostalgia for print intell. bohemian
Sontag - the two cultures and new sensibility
↑ yes

- New Film Theory
 - Collaborative
 - as opposed to previous theory: the ideas of great men
 - seen as individuals (eg, Dudley Andrew, The Major Film Theories)
 - this view needs some revision: eg, Soviet 20s
 - at key points produced an essentially collective or collaborative basis by groups which worked together (or at least in a productive tension) with a sense of working out of or towards a common political unity and research agenda
 - Positif
 - Cinéthique
 - Cahiers du cinéma
 - Movie
 - Screen
 - Cineaste
 - Jump Cut
 - Women & Film
 - Camera Obscura
 - Ciné-Tracts
 - CineAction!
 - Framework
 - the production of a number of important collaborative works following a certain program
 - films
 - eg, Mulvey-Wollen
 - essays
 - books and editorial work
 - networking is essential
 - this is a necessary part of validation, of discussion, for intellectuals; a certain critical mass must be attained for productive work within a community (as opposed to the simple elaboration of work by isolated individuals)
 - this is also a necessary for professional advancement, particularly for academics, but also for state functionaries (BFI, etc.)
 - International
 - though this needs to be qualified
 - the US/UK/France axis is strong
 - related, but weaker:
 - Australia, Canada
 - Germany
 - esp Frauen und Film
 - other connections would have to be accounted for
 - US/Latin America
 - International art avant garde

Afterimage?

UK/France/Africa

- based in an analysis of film as cultural phenomenon
 - as opposed to "aesthetic experience" (Kantian idealist aesthetics)
 - various terms are put forward
 - film as cultural product
 - as "signifying Practice"
 - as ideological
 - in general, the intention here is to get beyond simple formalist internal analysis as well as reductionist social/political analysis
- film is seen as connected to
 - in some kind of relationship with other cultural practices
 - however, significantly it is not investigated in terms of its relation to the social position of intellectuals; in other words, why at this point in history does film take on this significant role?
 - one could be skeptical and point out that by the late 60s film was notably in decline, economically and institutionally, in the capitalist core nations
 - but it would probably be more realistic to relate this to the generational development of film culture as an intellectual area, a probably necessary precedent to the fuller development of popular culture studies and esp. television studies
- In general, reality is understood as a social construction, that is we do not and can not have some kind of direct access to "the real" but we understand it thorough socially constructed knowledge *(changes from Bergson-Luckmann to Foucault.)*
- related to this, there is a general questioning of realist aesthetics
- there is a general interest in film "as film," that is in film style which opens up a an area for films which are reflexive, self-investigating, etc.
- this is related to the validation of directors who use camera, editing, sound, etc. in a highly self-conscious way
 - obviously Godard, but also Antonioni and other modernists, Bresson, some classic directors such as Ophuls and Lang, some h'wood such as Sirk
 - note however that all of these director/auteurs have very distinct comments to make about life; they are not formalists for art's sake, they have a recognizable moral position in their work (even when that is counter to dominant morality as with Godard, Antonioni, etc.)
- there is an unclear relation to history in general and film history in particular the question tends to be put aside

*Need in this section
to constantly ~~pull~~ pull
down level of generalization
by concrete examples.*

Cultural Studies, notes: various

Cultural studies is the place where aesthetics and sociology come together in a playful and productive exchange and synthesis (sometimes).

There is a pessimism now about the possibility of creating an effective alternative: thus Hall is very negative toward the counter-culture (though this must be in part understood through its British manifestation). But the context of the counterculture was one of a rising movement for Black and minority rights and community struggles, for sectoral change, for anti-imperialist struggle. The point is not to get nostalgic about the 60s but to realize that no counter cultural effort can ever escape repression (seldom included in the formula), cooptation, selling out, etc. In other words, a realistic strategy must include an analysis of that as well.

At the same time, any strategy in culture cannot rely simply on creating an alternative, be that in the galleries of the avant garde or the clubs of the subculture or the streets of the dispossessed. It must also at some point be capable of contesting for power where that power is strongest, in the dominant structures, in the transnationals themselves, in the corporate world. That world depends on a workforce, or actually several of them. Abroad it exploits in the most direct and brutal way agricultural and factory workers. At home it depends on a white collar workforce which is itself significantly regimented and bent to the imperatives of Taylorized work. The Information Age "...has placed the levers of social change at the fingertips of over 30 million computer workers, the laborers who process the data that is crucial to nearly every corporation and government agency." Hayes

The Development of Cultural Studies

Mass Culture

Popular Culture

British Cultural Studies: A Short Critical Introduction

"academic" vs. "intellectual"

questions of national (even regional) vs. international context

building on someone else's system

- **Jameson, Pol UnCon, notes 1.0**

- need for totalizing, historicizing analysis
a choice:

- the objective structures of a text
historicity of its forms and content
specific situation of its aesthetic
- the interpretative categories through which we receive the text
 - ◊ the dynamics of the act of interpretation

"we never really confront a text immediately, in all its freshness as a thing-in-itself. Rather, texts come before us as the

always-already-read we apprehend them through sedimented layers of previous interpretations..." (my ital.)

- priority of a Marxist interpretive framework in terms of semantic richness
- This book does not propose a revolutionary aesthetic...
 - "some as yet unrealized, collective, and decentered cultural production of the future, beyond realism and modernism alike."

◊ **but isn't this precisely the terrain of postmodernism?**

- nor traditional philosophical aesthetics

- "nature and function of art,
specificity of poetic language and of
the aesthetic experience,
the theory of the beautiful,
and so forth."

- consumer society, society of the spectacle... "such a society, with messages and with "aesthetic" experiences of all kinds, the issues of an older philosophical aesthetics themselves need to be radically historicized, and can be expected to be transformed beyond recognition in the process."

◊ **but this is to give up the high ground without seeing the continuity of these older questions, particularly for artists**

- nor literary history
- nor handbook of a new method
 - *ideological analysis* which remains...the appropriate designation for the critical "method" specific to Marxism

- "the specific critical and interpretive task of the present volume, namely to restructure the problematics of ideology, of the unconscious and desire, of representation, of history, and of cultural production, around the all-informing process of narrative, which I take to be ...the central function or *instance* of the human mind."

- **the need to account for image, for music, for other forms of elaboration and development, for the lyric, for the expository modes is left out**

from Barnes
5/2

- the formal dilemma of all cultural study today...an uneasy struggle for p: between models and history, between theoretical speculation and textual analysis.... Marxism...affirms a primacy of theory which is at one and same time a recognition of the primacy of History itself.

some theses on the canon/value/change

1. To understand something you have to understand the whole category, all the range it covers, and (potentially) all the examples within it.
2. You also have to understand the context, that which surrounds it, that which forms borders with it, is adjacent to it, which interacts (positively, negatively, or neutrally) with it.
3. Marxists study things in terms of change; philosophically this is the doctrine of dialectics. That is, Marxism assumes that the social world must be fundamentally understood as changing and changeable, as being in flux, even though at any one moment there may seem to be very little or no change.
4. Therefore it is important to study the center, the dominant, and also the edge, the periphery. The tendency for intellectuals is to study the dominant as if it were the whole or at least sufficient, even if they approach it from a critical or antagonistic position. This revalidates the importance of the dominant, privileges the privileged.
- 4a. Of course it is possible to simply consider the margin, or one section of the periphery, as if that were sufficient, and from a cultural separatist/nationalist position it is. The dominant is considered only to attack or dismiss it and it becomes the necessary devil. Or parts of it can be selectively assimilated into the margin through clever rationalization. But such a strategy is fundamentally weak. For we must also recognize the significant interchange between center and edge.
5. Change, growth, usually takes place at the edge.
- 5.a. The question of value can never be negligible, but it can be postponed. In other words, if value is the enabling act of criticism, it is the crippling act of analysis. And unless analysis precedes criticism, we are simply circling around what we already know, even if we don't know that, even when we haven't experienced the presumed "new" thing. "Without investigation, no right to speak."--Mao.

6. In everybody's present historical situation, there can be, I believe, no single center of value and hence no absolute standards. That does not mean that assignment of values must be arbitrary or self-serving (like my students, whose defense of their poetry is "I felt it"). It does mean that for the linear hierarchy of good and bad it becomes necessary to substitute a multitude of centers of value, each with its own periphery, some closer to each other, some farther apart. [Joanna Russ, 120] [contrast this with Marx on Greek art]

7. Well, as in cells and sprouts, growth occurs only at the edges of something. From the peripheries, But even to see the peripheries, it seems, you have to be on them, or by an act of re-vision, place yourself there. Refining and strengthening the judgments you already have will get you nowhere. You must break set. It's either that or remain at the center. The dead, dead center. [Russ, 132]

NTSC notes 1.2

When I heard a schoolteacher warn the other night about the invasion of the American educational system by foreign curriculums, I wanted to yell at the television set, "Lady, there're already here." It has already begun because the world is here. The world has been arriving at these shores for at least ten thousand years from Europe, Africa, and Asia. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, large numbers of Europeans arrived, adding their cultures to those of the European, African, and Asian settlers who were already here, and recently millions have been entering the country from South American and the Caribbean, making...[the] bouillabaisse richer and thicker.

Ishamel Reed (1988)

Theory notes

unsystematic arrangement

subj/lang

"...because of Foucault and what he says of linguistics, ethnology, and psychoanalysis, man is dissolved in the overarching waves, in the quanta, the striations of language itself, turning finally into little more than a constituted subject, a speaking pronoun, fixed indecisively in the eternal, ongoing rush of discourse."

Said, 287.

We now have to accept the idea that the experience of feature film viewing with a large darkened auditorium, large screen, fixed seats facing front, bright reflected light, attentive large audience, the traditional apparatus of traditional viewing is an historically/culturally specific kind of media experience, one which will continue for some time, but which is as specific and dated as watching a nickelodeon. Most people, most of the time, see most movies on a tv screen in their homes. So the kind and quality of viewing experience described by Metz and others is not a timeless universal but a very socially-culturally fixed form of experience, and one which is becoming increasingly rare and unusual. When films are seen theatrically it is increasingly on significantly smaller screens, and with an audience whose primary audio-visual experience is with television. Under these circumstances, to think as if film viewing simply remains the state of dream and plenitude of the past is another form of nostalgia.